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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ADDIS ABABA 002273

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PGOV PHUM KDEM PREL ET
SUBJECT: POLITICAL INDOCTRINATION IN ETHIOPIA

REF: ADDIS 1612

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Tulinabo Mushingi for Reasons 1.
4 (b) and (d).

Summary

¶11. (C) Political opposition leaders and Chairman of the National Teacher's Association allege that the government has held several political indoctrination "trainings" in recent months. They told PolOffs that students, teachers, farmers, and civil servants are being targeted for "political re-education" sessions that promote the ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) ideology. The increasing frequency of such reports to PolOff suggest that the government is intensifying its recruitment efforts prior to the 2010 national elections. End summary.

Ruling Party's Heavy-Handed Recruitment of Students, Teachers, Farmers

¶12. (C) Opposition political party leaders and National Teacher's Association Chairman have recently recounted to PolOffs several cases they believe are examples of government attempts at political indoctrination. According to Oromo People's Congress opposition party leader Merera Gudina, beginning in June high school students in Oromiya have been selected by local EPRDF cadres and sent to military camps for what Merera called "political re-education." Merera added that these sessions, facilitated by regional government officials, typically last about 15 days. Military camps throughout Oromiya, including Holota and Tole, are allegedly utilized for the training. According to Merera, following the training the students are coerced into joining the Oromo People's Democratic Organization (OPDO), part of the ruling EPRDF coalition.

¶13. (C) According to United Ethiopian Democratic Forces opposition party leader Beyene Petros, while those selected are not physically forced to attend the sessions or join the OPDO, local officials threaten to punish those who do not. Beyene said punishments include withholding microfinance loans, sabotaging efforts to get into preferred

universities, arbitrarily arresting people for days or weeks, threatening family members, and defaming a person's name so they can no longer find employment and are forced to relocate. Beyene added that in addition to targeting students, the government also targets civil servants and farmers for "political indoctrination trainings." He said that farmers' "trainings" are held in local kebeles and facilitated by local officials.

¶4. (C) National Teacher's Association Chairman Mekcha Mengistu told PolOff that the Ministry of Education held conferences, each entitled "Quality Education Package," throughout the country in late June/early July. Mekcha, who participated in one conference, told PolOff that he felt the government's true intent was political indoctrination. Mekcha showed PolOff materials that were distributed at the conference he attended, which included five booklets entitled "Developmental Democracy and Revolutionary Democracy," "Strategies and Revolutionary Democracy on Urban Industrial Development," "Creation of Democratic Structure and Revolutionary Democracy," "EPRDF Democratic Program," and "General Education Quality." At the end of the 12-day conference, Mekcha said that facilitators publicly distributed OPDO party membership forms and one of them told the teachers that "if you refuse to be part of the party, you

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shouldn't expect to be paid." Several teachers from different regions of the country told PolOff that teachers who are not members of the EPRDF coalition are discriminated against in job hiring and promotion, and sometimes fired for refusing to join the EPRDF.

Comment

¶5. (C) Though allegations of political indoctrination by the Ethiopian Government are not new, the frequency of such organized and targeted mass "training" sessions seems to be increasing in recent months, with several regular interlocutors raising the issue to PolOffs in recent meetings. The indoctrination trainings and conferences add to a long list of alleged coercive recruitment techniques used by the government, such as withholding of food aid, seeds and fertilizers to non-EPRDF members and preferential treatment in job assignment, promotion, and profession development for EPRDF members (Ref A). Such organized and targeted indoctrination sessions may reflect the ruling party's insecurity about its level of popular support in view of the coming 2010 elections. End comment.

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